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EDITORIALS.

A New Biological Journal. — We have the pleasure of recording the advent of another excellent periodical from France devoted to biology. *L'Intermédiaire des Biologistes, organe international de Zoologie, Botanique, Physiologie, et Psychologie*, the first number of which appeared November 5, is edited by Prof. Alfred Binet, with the assistance of Dr. Victor Henri and an editorial committee of thirty-four, including Profs. J. M. Baldwin and C. S. Minot from America. The journal, which is to appear semi-monthly, cherishes the high ideal of becoming the medium of communication between the members of the great family of biologists scattered in all countries. The immediate practical aim is that of furnishing to biologists information of interest to them as investigators. This information will be afforded, first, by a department of "Questions and Answers," and, secondly, by summaries of the biological periodicals. In addition, a brief space may be devoted to original articles and preliminaries. The number now before us contains "An Appeal to Physiologists," by E. J. Marey, for the establishment of a commission to make the types of instruments used in physiological work uniform; forty-six queries, largely in psychology, nearly all instructive by their suggestiveness; bibliographic lists of contents of periodicals, eight pages; three new pieces of physiological apparatus, with illustrations. Of the importance of such a journal as this we have no doubt. In how far it will serve the working naturalist who wants certain information is yet to appear. Generally he wants it quickly; but not infrequently the queries will relate to a life work, when he can afford to wait, as Darwin did, months and even years for the answers to his questionings. But whatever this journal does towards uniting biologists, towards establishing a habit of mutual dependence and aid, will not fail to advance the science.

Scientific Names. — There has recently come into our hands a small paper of no little value to systematic naturalists. We refer to Professor Walter Miller's "Scientific Names of Latin and Greek Derivation," published in the *Proceedings of the California Academy of Science* and reprinted by the Stanford University. The paper should be a *vade mecum*, studied and restudied by every person who is in danger of describing new genera and new species. Were its

teachings followed we should not have our tastes shocked by such hybrid names as *Gillichthys*; we should no longer have to see feminine adjectives coupled with masculine nouns; we should no longer be in doubt as to whether *Alcyonaria* or *Halcyonaria*, *Aplodinotus* or *Haplodinotus* was the preferable form.

We wish, however, to make use of the paper as a text, rather than for a regular review. From one standpoint the appearance of this paper is to be regretted. There is danger of its falling into the hands of those who will feel it their duty to reform nomenclature in accordance with the rules there laid down and thus inflict upon a suffering world a new series of useless terms. There are people who cannot realize that our system of systematic nomenclature is not an end but a means. It is really the foundation of our book-keeping, and to change this book-keeping from day to day is far from facilitating actual work. We are told that the whole endeavor of the systematic purists is to result in permanence, but we have been waiting for this permanence now these many years, and, so far as we can see, it is as far off as ever.

We have no fault to find with the law of priority, no fault with the rule that names shall be formed in consonance with the laws of philology. What we do find fault with is the feeling that these man-made laws are inviolable and the evident disinclination to use that best of gifts, common sense, in their application. All the world knows what *Amphioxus* is. The name is used in every paper dealing with its structure, but the law of priority demands that *Branchiostoma* be substituted for it. Were it possible to make the substitution, would there be any more permanence than if the better-known name be left alone? *Lepidosteus* is in almost world-wide use. Is permanence effected by resurrecting the fact that, in defiance of the laws of euphony and philology, its original form was written *Lepisosteus*?

But these are not the worst cases to bother us. The most absurd are those changes which are based upon the law that names of similar origin but of different form are in conflict, and that the later one must stand aside on the ground of possible misunderstanding. *Ellobius* must go because *Ellobium* was described first; *Gymnura* must be renamed because of possible confusion with the earlier *Gymnurus*. These are little better than those cases of changes proposed because of alleged inappropriateness or inaccuracy of name.

We who are not engaged solely in systematic work are beginning to get weary with this continual shuffling and changing of names. We do not find that fixity which we had been led to expect. Names

are less certain in their meaning than they were twenty or thirty years ago. Who can tell to-day what a writer means if he mentions some fact about *Acer saccharinum*? One must first be acquainted with the mental composition of the author; is he radical or is he conservative in his make-up?

We can suggest no better business for the American Association for the Advancement of Science than the appointment of a committee to take the initiative in reopening this whole question of laws of nomenclature, and in the appointment of such a committee care should be taken that morphologists and physiologists as well as systematists should be recognized in its make-up. It would be desirable to see if it be not practicable to institute some law of limitation to the priority rule, or there will always be those who will write *Astacus* when they refer to the lobster. Such a committee could coöperate with other similar bodies appointed by other scientific organizations elsewhere, and thus make some laws of universal application.

Marvelous Technique. — At various times during the past year the daily papers have contained accounts of a wonderful discovery on the part of an alleged American professor to the effect that he had been able to increase the magnifying power of the microscope to an extent hardly dreamed of by other workers. So long as these accounts were confined to the daily press we took no notice of them, but now that they have obtained entrance into such a worthy journal as the *New York Medical Times* we think it time to lodge a protest. The "discovery" is in effect the insertion of a second microscope in the place of the ocular of the first. It is true that this will result in an amplification of the image, but every tyro knows that this process is an old one, and that, while an enlargement results, there is no gain in definition; it is merely a magnification of the imperfections of the first objective. Still greater amplification than any this so-called professor claims can be obtained by the simple projection microscope, but no one who has seen a nucleus thus "thrown up" until the image has a diameter of six or eight feet will claim that the process discloses features before invisible.

The same brilliant discoverer announces also a still more brilliant discovery in technique by which he has been able to obtain sections "of about one one-hundredth the thickness of the finest slice ever hitherto obtained." For refinement of technique his procedure "beats the Dutch." "I cemented upon a glass slide a single layer of cells, and then placed upon this slide another slide whose surface had been freshly covered with cement and allowed them to remain in

contact until the upper and lower surfaces of the cells had become cemented to the glass slides. Then I introduced between the two glass plates a very thin blade of copper (!), the edge of which had been sharpened to the very finest cutting surface possible. . . . This blade is introduced between the two plates and pushed along between them so as to separate them, and on its way it slices the cells in the middle. One of these plates is then cemented to another glass plate with the cut surfaces of the cells against the other glass plate and the slicing operation repeated," *ad infinitum*.

The same article proceeds next to the superlative. No longer will Spencer's well-known characterization of life be quoted. Our brilliant professor has solved the problem. "I am satisfied," says he, "that life is mind — that all vital phenomena are mental. A cell can feel stimuli and can *adapt acts* to *ends* (*sic*). Now, only mind can do this; only animate bodies have minds, and mind alone it is which constitutes their life." There follows much more of the same sort, but we have no room for further quotations. Some years ago the *American Naturalist* (vol. xxi, p. 549) advertised for an author for a much needed "Unnatural History," stating the qualifications necessary in the person who should undertake the work. The author is now found, and if the present flow of lucubrations be continued, the volume missing from all libraries will soon be an accomplished fact.

The Society for Plant Morphology and Physiology. — In the formation of the Society for Plant Morphology and Physiology an important step has been taken for the advancement of botany in America. We have no intention of assuming the functions of a scientific newspaper, but the first annual meeting of this society is an event of such significance that we are very glad to publish the report of its proceedings, which is presented on another page. At this meeting the workers on the morphological and physiological sides of botany have come together for the first time as a distinct body, and one is able to obtain for the first time a comprehensive view of what is being done in this country along these lines of investigation. There was, naturally, considerable variation in the quality of the papers presented, but one cannot fail to be impressed with the variety and amount of work which they represent and their generally excellent character. Certainly the society is to be congratulated upon the success of its first meeting, and no doubt its meetings in the future will be of even greater interest, and will exert a profound and broadening influence not alone upon the botany in this country but upon the biology in general.